

Pink Collar Work

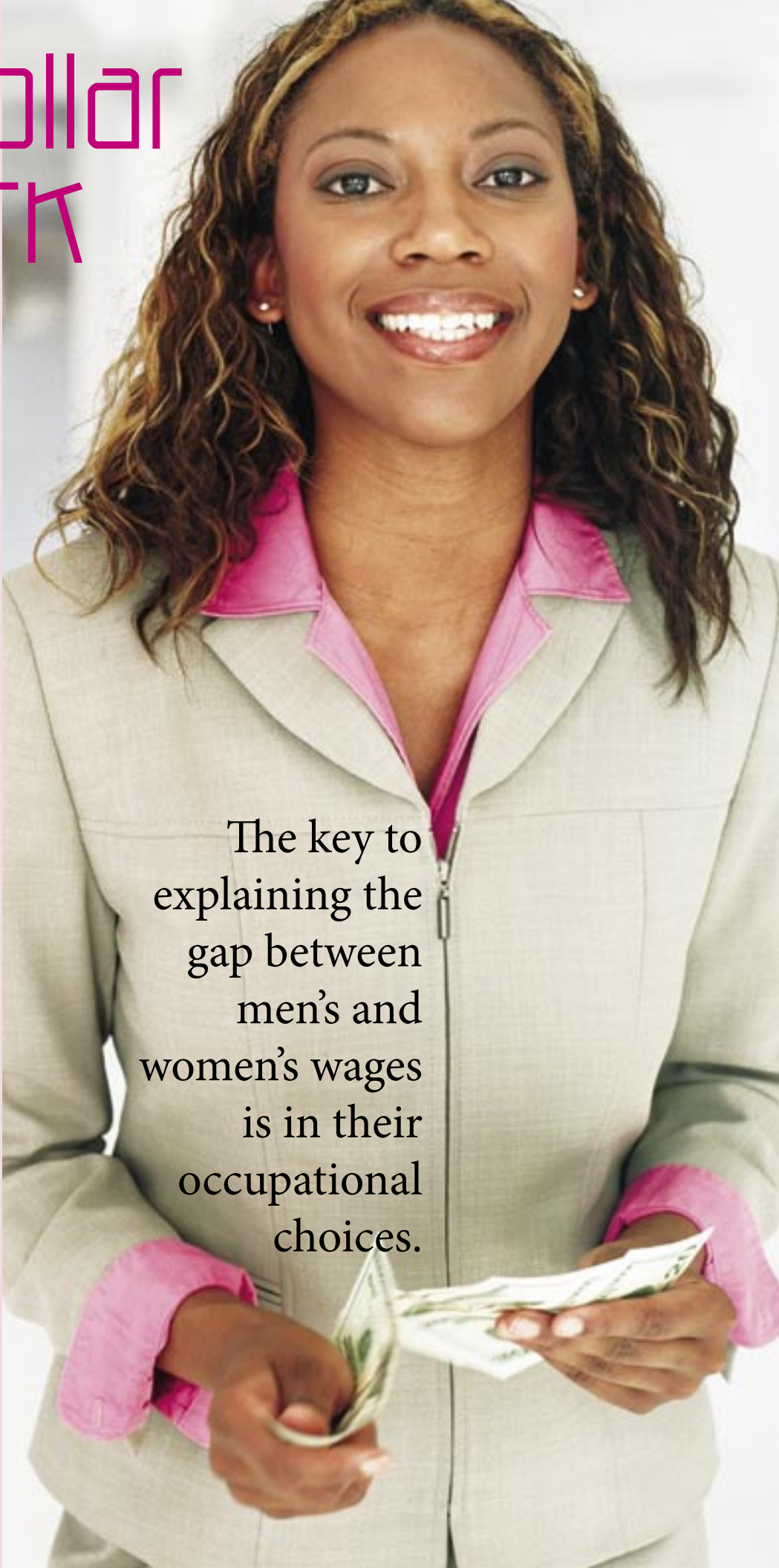
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While it may be the case in some instances that a woman is paid less for doing the same work as a man, most of the wage disparity is explained by the fact that women tend to choose occupations that rank lower on the pay scale than the occupations typically chosen by men. Most calculations of a male/female wage gap are done on economy-wide data. As such, they include a mixture of all kinds of occupations. When consideration is made for the various occupations, a pattern emerges showing that it is women's occupational choices that have the most dampening effect on their wages relative to men.

Best Paying Jobs

After perusing Census 2000 data, it becomes obvious that the best paying jobs for men are also generally the best paying jobs for women. Physicians, dentists, air traffic controllers, chief executives, lawyers, engineering managers, optometrists, and pharmacists are among the best paying positions for both men and women.

However, you just might notice that these jobs are typically dominated by men. For example, in Utah, physicians and surgeons are only 17 percent female, dentists are only 3 percent female, air traffic controllers are 15 percent female, chief executives are 13 percent female, engineering managers are 8 percent female,



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optometrists are 20 percent female, and lawyers are 18 percent female. Of these high paying occupations only one—pharmacists (with 36 percent female)—has more than a one-fifth share of positions held by women.

Interestingly, in these occupations women typically make more than 80 percent of the median wage of their male counterparts. In other words, the wage gap is smaller than average for these occupations. As we'll explain later, occupational choice is the primary reason for the male/female wage gap.

Occupational Choice

Much of the difference in men's and women's wages occurs because of occupational choice. Women tend to choose employment—for whatever reason (and we've covered a number of them in the previous section)—that is lower paying. This may be one reason that Utah shows a larger-than-average wage gap. Fewer Utah women have moved into male-dominated occupations than in the nation as a whole.

Some may argue that traditional female jobs pay less just because the market discriminates against those jobs. However, this does not remove the fact that women choose them regardless of their low pay. We've seen right here that in many occupations that are dominated by men—requiring technical/science/math/analytical skills—the wage gap often almost disappears.

In fact, the general rule of thumb for women and wages? The more nontraditional the job, the higher the pay for a woman. There are two exceptions to

this rule—nurses and dental hygienists.

Studies suggest that even for college-educated professionals, choice of occupation accounts for 30-70 percent of the entire wage gap.

Jobs with the Smallest Wage Gap

If you're a Utah woman and want a job in Utah where you're most likely to make as much as your male co-worker, what occupation should you choose? According to Census 2000 figures, choose a technical/science/math-related position or one that's typically dominated by men. There are almost 60 occupations in Utah where the average woman makes 95-percent or more of the average man's wage.

Many of these positions are in science, healthcare, and engineering fields (which also pay extremely well) and require at least a bachelor's degree. Others are technically-oriented, requiring some post-high school training. Others require only on-the-job training, but are occupations traditionally held by men.

Lower Wages Hurt

Lower wages impact our society and economy. In 1999, according to Census figures, almost 30 percent of Utah female-headed families with children had incomes below the poverty-line. In comparison, only 5 percent of married couple families with children and 14 percent for single male-headed families were in poverty.

In addition, over time, women-headed families are making up a larger and larger share of all families in poverty.

Back in 1965, U.S. female-headed families accounted for only 9 percent of total families in poverty. By 2002, they constituted 17 percent of families in poverty.

Whether through divorce, desertion, death, or remaining single, more than 85 percent of American women can expect to have to support themselves and/or their children at some time in their lives. If these women are improperly prepared for the labor force, they may find themselves in the ranks of the poor.

What's the Solution?

Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut, easy solution to the male/female wage gap problem. However, employers, teachers, counselors and economists have offered advice on things that can be done to chip away at the problem. Most of these suggestions focus on changing young women's perspectives on careers, encouraging them to tackle school subjects that in the past they may have avoided, and assuring them that they have the same job opportunities and job potential as their male counterparts.

